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ABSTRACT

The member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development generally provide monolingual basic education, and the imposition of a common language remains one of the political and economic functions of the schools. Multilingual or bilingual education is marginal. The individual states' language policies reflect interests in preserving geographic and economic equilibrium, managing an established national cultural and linguistic community, integrating migration waves, and protecting a fully-formed national culture. The schools themselves are as resistant to the societies' existing multilingualism as are government policies, which is resulting in widespread illiteracy. Hostility toward minority languages parallels the spread of a new scientific culture in the schools. Efforts toward equal education have frequently been sabotaged by the privileged and have served to widen rather than narrow the gaps between social classes. Issues that must be addressed include the risks and difficulties of language planning, finding a balance of equality and uniformity that is not prejudicial to the integration of minorities, and combining equality with diversity. (MSE)

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LANGUAGE PLANNING POLICIES IN THE OECD MEMBER COUNTRIES

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LANGUAGE PLANNING POLICIES IN THE OECD MEMBER COUNTRIES

I. Some facts about language teaching in the OECD Member countries

The results of a three year project on Education and Cultural and Linguistic Pluralism in the OECD Member countries can be summed up as follows:

Generally speaking, basic education (the first 9-10 years of schooling) is monolingual in all countries. The curricula are organised around the dominant position of a single language and the mastering of the language of teaching is one of the main criteria of cultural and scholastic excellence.

The imposition of a unique, common, standardized language is still one of the main political, as well as economical, functions of the school. This is true even for those countries built up as immigrants' countries, like Canada, USA and Australia. The development of bilingual and multilingual education is marginal: there are few schools, few classes effectively bilingual. This observation can be applied in the European countries as well, when the development of foreign language teaching in comprehensive schools or in junior high schools (learning one or two foreign languages is compulsory in almost all European countries) does not modify the fundamental monolinguistic inspiration of the school system.

It is worthwhile recalling that behind bilingual education or, more generally speaking, the development of linguistic skills in the schools, there is a set of powerful social movements influencing the educational trends: political institutions, business entreprises, the educational system itself, the legal system, cultural industries, etc.

A more detailed study of individual states' attitudes towards national culture, viewed in particular through the language policies that they pursue, would bring out the following trends among countries (Verne, 1984):

-- Preserving the geographical and economic equilibrium among their nations, either through constitutional and legislative checks that uphold and protect the status quo by impeding any movement, or through the political imposition of one nation's cultural power upon the rest (this is the case in Yugoslavia, Switzerland, Spain, New Zealand).

-- Managing of an established national cultural and linguistic community and endeavour to preserve or restore what remains of cultural individuality, out of nostalgia but also due to a resurgence of regional activism (the case of France, U.K., Italy).

-- Integrating the successive waves of migration, with distinct and antagonistic strata of migrants, where older immigrants today have to cope with newcomers (USA, Canada, Australia).

-- Protecting a fully-formed national culture now under threat from external influences (Japan, Ireland, Island, Scandinavian countries).

The impact of the various social movements on the educational system would not deserve to attract much attention if education systems had not been marked by a long tradition of a single language and culture. No one appears to doubt that schools have indeed accomplished one of their historic missions: to legitimize, produce and reproduce a national culture. And no one doubts that this task has been broadly achieved, even where particular cultural features have been able to stand out despite this cultural levelling. Where the State has protected national differences, cultural diversification is still represented by single-language cultural blocks placed beside one another. In accomplishing this task, schools have resorted to the gradual introduction of a school culture of their own which has rapidly become dominant and has thus contributed to cultural homogeneity by imposing itself

(B. Bernstein, 1971; P. Bourdieu and J.C. Passeron, 1970), even if human differences reveal, here and there, residual anomalies within the pattern of the behaviour and attitudes imposed and made universal by the schools (H. Le Bras and E. Todd, 1981). Governmental cultural policy in schools has always been to maintain a single culture within frontiers or within linguistic areas fixed by history and the constitution.

Not only the governmental policies in the field of education, but the school culture itself is allergic, idiosyncratic towards any form of multilinguism in the schools. In a sense, it is unnatural for the school to be bilingual and moreover multilingual, as Ivan Illich has clearly stated.

Multilinguism is a de facto situation in society to which the school has so far felt bound to remain impermeable. The school has dramatically failed to promote a common linguistic background for all the citizens of the same state. Consider for example the case of Italian in Italy: Italian linguistic society announced proudly some years ago that at the beginning of the 1980s more than 50 per cent of the Italian population was finally able to understand and to use the standard Italian language. This result has been achieved after more than 80 years of compulsory education and two decades of an agressive linguistic policy developped during the fascist period. In this case, the governmental schools proved to be unable to realise the linguistic homogeneity of the nation.

But, a stronger demonstration is produced by the data about illiterate people in the industrialised countries. A rough OECD estimation considers that the number of illiterate people in the 25 most industrialised countries which have the most developped educational systems and the highest percentages of public expenditures devoted to education should be about 100 million people. The present educational system is therefore unable to reach one of its main objectives: to make all the adult population competent in writing and reading.

The linguistic issues in the present educational policies have little weight: there is a widespread consensus about the limits of the school system to teach foreign languages and the national standard language. The

discrepancy between investments for teaching languages and the results is dramatic indeed but more or less tolerated. In the agenda of the public debate about the quality of education, the priority items are merit pay, vouchers, discipline, moral education, core values, family choices, and leadership, both in the States and in Europe. Linguistic skills are no longer the main parameters of school excellence. Over the past 30 years, the classical parameters of school excellence, which were linguistically oriented in the majority of the European school systems, have been replaced with a new one, pertaining to scientific and technical culture.

It has been a fast evolution indeed, given the very well known slowness of the school to adopt an innovation (in 1941, Mort estimated that about 50 years were necessary to generalise an innovation through out the school system).

The shift from a linguistically to a scientifically and technologically dominant culture in the school is certainly impressive but did not change the cultural and social function of the education. Adopting new criteria of excellence and orienting the curricula in a more mathematical direction, the school systems continue to produce and diffuse an unifying culture, operating as an instrument of cultural homogeneity at a different level from the previous one, which was only national. In this perspective, it is interesting to note that the most serious problem in almost all countries is finding and retaining competent teachers in science and mathematics, without caring about the competences of mother tongue or foreign language teachers.

The education policies of the most advanced industrialised countries have already accomplished this silent revolution. For this reason, bilingual or multilingual education are not strongly supported in countries like USA, France, U.K. Japan, Germany. The promotion of the vernacular languages, the maintenance of the immigrants' language, the development of ethnic minority languages do not fit in with the economical and political interests of the dominant groups who have the capacity to define the aims of educational policies. Paradoxically,the minor relevance of language problems in present educational policies opened a possibility of developing bilingual education

for the ethnic minority groups who constitue a large sector of the less privileged groups in our societies, while the majority has a new challenge to reinforce their domination mastering the universal culture of science. In a context like this, it is easier than in the past to recognise the rights of minorities to maintain their own ancestral languages. There is a parallelism between a less agressive hostility of the educational system towards the minorities' languages and the spread of the new scientific culture in schools.

II. The changing scenario of schooling in the industrialised countries

Equal opportunities for whom?

During the last twenty years, the linguistic homogeneity within a nation has become less relevant than the new trends towards homogeneity at the international level. Placing this evolution in the context of educational equality, this could be interpreted as an apparent progress of equality and in fact an increase of inequality, given the new possibilities opened for the majority who can reinforce their cultural domination acquiring new knowledge, eventually another language and different communicative patterns. This is an excellent application of one of the "iron laws" of educational development: the priviledged groups and social strata constantly seek to maintain their privileges. When structures and institutions are made more open, the expectation of greater equality of educational chances has frequently been disappointed by the ability of the better-off to establish new criteria of success and by strategies that sidestep equalising policies. The right of parents to seek what is perceived to be the best education for their children cannot be denied. But it further underlines the need for commitment to those who do not enjoy the same privilege as others (OECD, 1985).

These issues have been discussed during an Experts'Meeting on "Educational Policies and Minority Social Groups" held in Paris at the OECD Headquarters in January 1985 as an activity of the above mentioned CERI Project. The general rapporteur of this meeting, Walo Hutmacher, Director of the Sociological Research Unit of the Department of Education of Geneva, has

developed in his final comments to the meeting the following statements about the shift towards a new dominant cultural framework and the adoption of the cultural paradigm for explaining inequality deserving to be quoted in extenso given their pertinence for the topics handled here:

> "Science, which is essentially supra- and trans-cultural, is forcing upon the most widely diverse national, ethnic, racial and religious allegiances and susceptibilities its claim to universality and relative compatibility, which derives most of its force and legitimacy from the role of scientific research and, more particularly, its technological spinoffs in the worldwide political and economic arena.
>
> It would seem that the new universal has become the true cultural objective towards which a drive for cultural homogenisation is being directed throughout the world. All the cultural media are helping directly or indirectly to consolidate the legitimacy of rational thought and scientific research and to disseminate their content. The educational systems are no exception to this. The increasing stress placed on science in legitimate educational culture is leading to a situation where education in the various countries is becoming increasingly similar.
>
> It is important to realise that this process is also playing a part in the relativisation of national cultures. National feelings are increasingly being directed to the various fields of international competition where pre-eminence is measured by transnational criteria of excellence..."

The interest for multicultural education and bilingual programmes has to be connected to the change of the paradigm adopted for explaining the educational inequalities. Following Hutmacher, multicultural education became relevant when it has been admitted that cultural handicaps have to be considered as the main cause of educational underachievement:

"To say that the educational achievement or adjustment of children from certain social groups is related to their cultural origin is tantamount to ascribing this to the way in which relationships at school, the behaviour, skills and educational performance of these children are shaped and dictated by the systems of predispositions to perceive, think, believe, evaluate, feel and act that have been acquired through the experience gained within the groups to which they belong. Adopting such a view as regards the etiology of success and failure at school is not simply an intellectual operation, socially neutral and gratuitous. It ascribes a specific meaning to educational inequalities which reflects a particular anthropological interpretation.

Since the underachievement of children of ethnic minority groups is blamed on certain characteristics specific to them, it does not bring into question either the existence of the school in the way it operates. Much better, such an explanation allows in many cases to demand and to obtain extra resources to enable it to cope with the problems of particular groups of children.

The cultural paradigms, i.e. the explanation of inequalities in educational achievement as related to cultural differences that result from being of a particular ethnic, racial or national origin brings the underachievement problem into the realm of the treatable: the problem is soluble, adopting an appropriate educational policy, without modifying the effective power relationships among the social classes. Bilingual education policies as multicultural education policies take place within this theoretical framework.

The educational policies pursued over the past thirty years as part of the move to make education available to all and provide "equality of opportunity" have helped everywhere to raise the general standard of formal education acquired by the generations about to embark upon working life, whilst at the same time maintaining the gaps between children from different social classes." (Hutmacher, 1985).

III. Future issues

Risks and difficulties of language planning

The term "language planning" is usually interpreted in two senses: a narrow and a large one. A strict language planning process, including an establishment of goals, the selection and the prediction of means, is an exception. The rebirth of Hebrew in Israel is perhaps a unique example of a successful national language planning implemented in these last forty years.

The majority of OECD countries have some language policies without any language planning. In some cases, these policies are explicit, in some others, implicit. France, Switzerland, Ireland, Belgium, Yugoslavia, Canada have an explicit language policy implemented as cultural policy. U.K., U.S.A., Australia, Italy and Spain have implicit, non-overt language policies. In both cases, the objectives of these policies are less linguistic than socio-cultural, political and economical.

This means that language problems (the language maintenance or shift) have to be considered in the social context, taking in account the prevailing social forces, economic situation, cultural forces and power of religious or ethnic traditions.

Bratt Paulston, OECD Consultant for language problems, thinks that, in OECD countries, the language planning efforts most likely to be successful are those which are supported by economic advantage (or similar social incentives) for the minority groups. She sustains the hypothesis that ethnic groups very rarely opt for continued language maintenance if the social conditions favor a shift to the national language (Bratt Paulston, 1985).

This consideration does not push to conclude that any effort of setting educational language policies for majority-groups as well as for minority-groups children is futile.

Equality and uniformity

It would be irrealistic to discuss the issue of language planning without considering the economical situation and the ethnic principles of social justice. More and more, progressive people in Europe as well as in the States are thinking that the recognition of cultural differences within the public education system implies a risk of perpetuating or maintaining inequalities during education, on entry into working life, and during working life itself. In other words, we must ask whether the introduction into educational programmes of courses designed to maintain or develop cultural and linguistic differences is not prejudicial to the social and economic integration of minorities. Is there a dilemma between the promotion of minorities' languages and ethnic programmes in the schools and the acquisition of the skills needed to take jobs, to enter into higher education, to avoid unemployment? The answer to this crucial question is based quite often on the results of bilingual education or of native language courses. Given the disappointement produced by the less convincing achievements of pupils attending these forms of education, one concludes that bilingual education does not work, without scrutinizing the implementation conditions and the causes of the failure.

This is enough for claiming that the best way for offering equal educational opportunities to the ethnic minorities' children is the traditional approach to education, that one of assimilation. Adopting a realistic point of view which takes into account the limits of schools, what is feasible inside as well as outside the school rooms, the quality and the competences of teachers, the overload of the curricula, it is said that schools have to focus their effort on the acquisition of competences in the dominant language. This is the base for improving academic achievement so as to enhance future economic performance. Therefore, the use of foreign or minorities' languages at school for as long a period as possible, for maintenance as well as transition, is seriously questioned.

Combining equality and diversity: an alternative for the future

The scholastic monoglossia is a radical way for improving the educational opportunities of disadvantaged ethnic minorities' children, a too simplistic solution indeed given the complexity of the language problems on one side and the social responsibility of education on the other side. The rational attractiveness of the monolingual organisation of curricula explains the recession of the movement sustaining bilingual education and the difficulties of proposing educational language planning taking into account the linguistic needs of the majority and the minorities as well.

Another reason concurs in reinforcing the scepticism towards a more differentiated language planning in education: the use of theories which do not integrate research findings and which are unable to generate predictions about programme outcomes under different conditions. Cummins (1985), in an analytical paper produced for OECD, sustains that data on "facts" from bilingual programmes exist, but they become interpretable for policy purposes only within the context of a coherent theory. In the same contribution, Cummins demonstrates that some consistent theoretical principles do emerge from the research on the effects of bilingual education on student's cognitive and academic development. In other words, a theoretical basis for at least some policy decisions does exist. There are enough data showing that, when programmes are well-implemented, students of minority ethnic groups can be empowered and encouraged with a decrease in educational failure.

Therefore, there are enough convincing reasons for adopting educational language planning. Practically, such planning can run if it is based upon a real knowledge of what is feasible in the classrooms. Nevertheless, before proposing and implementing a language plan, it is necessary to persuade the policy-makers that an initiative like this is worth supporting. As Bratt Paulston (1985) recalls at the end of her paper for OECD about language policies, the reluctancy and the hostility of policy decision makers towards planning is one of the most serious obstacles to be overcome before conceiving an effective educational language plan.

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